



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

**Decision Notice for Draft EA:  
*Proposed Resumed Largemouth Bass Stocking  
in Placid Lake***

Prepared by:  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Region 2  
3201 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804  
July 8, 2015

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to resume stocking largemouth bass in Placid Lake to enhance the existing bass sport fishery. The lake was last stocked in 1950 and has maintained a self-sustaining largemouth bass population since that time. FWP would stock disease-free fish from the FWP hatchery system (or other approved, disease-free sources) in order to provide recruitment stability (consistent production and survival of juvenile fish). Initial stocking rates would be 10-40 per surface-acre annually. The long-term goal is to improve the quality of a non-native sport fishery to enhance angler opportunity in an area with limited negative effects to native trout restoration.

Enhancement of the Placid Lake sport fishery is one component of proposed, larger scale management actions on lakes in the Clearwater River basin. Proposed actions on other lakes in the vicinity (Alva, Inez, Seeley, and Salmon) include providing new harvest opportunity for bass fishing through removal of catch-and-release angling regulations. These changes are proposed as part of efforts to enhance native trout populations on main-stem lakes. Alternatively, the proposed action (stocking largemouth bass) is intended to enhance nearby sport fishing opportunities on Placid Lake, which is not a native trout stronghold and supports habitat that is more suitable for warm water fisheries.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED TO THE PROPOSED ACTION**

**No Action:** FWP would not stock largemouth bass (to supplement existing natural reproduction) in Placid Lake. The current situation--of inconsistent largemouth bass natural recruitment and a bass fishery on Placid Lake that is below potential--would continue.

## **MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PROCESS**

FWP is required to assess impacts to the human and physical environment under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). The proposal and its effects related to resuming largemouth bass stocking in Placid Lake were documented by FWP in a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA).

## **PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS**

FWP is required by MEPA to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released the draft EA for public review of this proposal on April 6, 2015 and accepted public comment through May 5, 2015. This comment period was 30 days.

Legal notice of the proposal and availability of the Draft EA was published once each in the *Independent Record* (Helena, April 6), *Missoulian* (April 6), and *Seeley Swan Pathfinder* (April 9) newspapers.

FWP mailed 8 copies of the EA--and emailed approximately 36 notifications of the EA's availability--to adjacent landowners, interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was available for public review and comment on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Recent Public Notices" and "Submit Public Comments") from April 6 through May 5, 2015.

## **SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

FWP received 20 comments during the public comment period, all from private citizens (Appendix A). Commenters were from the following Montana towns: 8 from Placid Lake, 2 from Seeley Lake, 4 from Missoula, one each from Kalispell and Great Falls, and 4 did not indicate a town. Six supported the proposal and 14 opposed the proposal.

The following summarizes comments in support of resuming largemouth bass stocking in Placid Lake. (The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of commenters who made this general point.)

1. Bass stocking would help relieve stress of growing fishing pressure, promote bass fishing, provide population stability, and/or encourage suppression of nongame fish (2)
2. Support proposal and favor bass habitat enhancement (2)

The following summarizes comments in opposition to, or with concerns regarding, resuming largemouth bass stocking in Placid Lake.

1. Concerned about impacts to bull trout and other native fish (6)

2. Concerned about impacts of bass on birds and other native wildlife (6)
3. Largemouth bass are an invasive nonnative species (2)
4. Current bass fishery is adequate and already expanding (4)
5. Expanded largemouth bass fishery would exacerbate current overcrowding of recreationists and/or social issues (4)
6. Funding for project would be better spent controlling nonnative vegetation and enhancing native trout (3)

## RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

Below is a summary of representative *public questions, comments, and suggestions* and FWP responses. For ease of response, similar comments from different individuals are grouped together if they expressed a similar view. (Commenter numbers below correspond to the numbering of the individual commenters in Appendix A.)

***Comment 1:*** *Support proposal based on relieving stress of growing fishing pressure, promoting bass fishing, providing population stability, and encouraging suppression of nongame fish (Commenters 2, 3).*

FWP Response: The proposal is intended to provide population stability and enhance quality of bass fishery in Placid Lake. FWP acknowledges several of the potential benefits mentioned by commenters, but believes it is unlikely that bass supplementation would lead to significant suppression of non-sport fish populations.

***Comment 2:*** *Support proposal and would like to see accompanying habitat enhancement and/or fishing regulation changes (Commenters 4, 7).*

FWP Response: Comments noted. Habitat enhancement and fishing regulation changes are not part of the existing proposal.

***Comment 3:*** *Do not support proposal, based on potential impacts to bull trout and other native aquatic populations and/or the proposal does not directly or indirectly promote native aquatic populations (Commenters 1, 5, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19).*

FWP Response: The proposal is intended to enhance the quality and consistency of an *established* largemouth bass population that has been self-sustaining in Placid Lake for more than 60 years. FWP acknowledges that the proposal is not intended to support or promote native aquatic populations in Placid Lake. However, providing sport fisheries--where native fisheries status and potential are limited--is a strategic way to meet sport fishing demand without compromising native fishery goals.

Although largemouth bass are omnivorous and can consume juvenile bull trout and many of the other species mentioned, FWP believes that impacts of the largemouth bass population on these species are negligible relative to other factors in the Placid Lake

drainage. In the case of bull trout, these factors include other fish species (predators and competitors) that are much more abundant and large-scale habitat degradation in spawning tributaries (e.g., Boles Creek). There is a consensus among professional aquatic biologists (from multiple groups and agencies) that these factors are the primary reason for native fish population declines and low probability of bull trout recovery in the Placid Creek drainage. Efforts are underway to identify and address physical limiting factors for bull trout in the drainage, identify any unrecognized bull trout spawning populations or occupied tributary habitats, and conserve/restore large blocks of habitat in the upper watershed.

Enhancing non-native sport fisheries is a critical component of larger scale, ongoing native fish restoration efforts underway in the Clearwater Basin. The support of anglers and recreationists is critical to the success of recovery efforts for bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, and other native aquatic species. Over the past 10 years, FWP has implemented more than 25 projects in the Clearwater Basin and invested >\$20 million to enhance native aquatic species. Accompanying non-native sport fisheries are important components for success of this overall program. In addition, intentional illegal introduction of new fish species (e.g., northern pike, smallmouth bass) is a major concern for Placid Lake and other nearby waters. The availability of quality nonnative sport fisheries (that are compatible with native fish) is an important factor--if we hope to stem unauthorized fish introductions and sustain native aquatic populations in the long term.

***Comment 4:*** Largemouth bass stocking would increase predation on bird population, as well as other aquatic and terrestrial wildlife (Commenters 8, 13, 14, 18, 19)

**FWP Response:** FWP acknowledges that largemouth bass are omnivorous and can consume many of the wildlife species listed in comments. However, primary diet items of this species are crustaceans, insects and fish. There is no evidence that the existing bass population is a primary limiting factor for bird or amphibian species on Placid Lake. Moreover, many of these species naturally co-occur with largemouth bass in other regions, and bass are not considered significant threats to these sympatric wildlife populations.

***Comment 5:*** Funding for this project should be spent on habitat restoration for native trout and other species, non-native fish suppression, and/or other programs (Commenters 10, 12).

**FWP Response:** The cost of supplemental largemouth bass stocking on Placid Lake would not be a significant added or transferable expenditure in the overall fisheries program. The cost of the proposed project is estimated at approximately \$5,000 annually, as part of FWP's existing state-wide hatchery programs. This funding is primarily an indirect cost within the operation of hatchery production. For comparison, average annual expenditures for fisheries management, native fish enhancement, and native fish habitat protection within the Clearwater Basin have exceeded \$500,000 per year on average over the past decade.

In addition, providing compatible non-native sport fisheries is considered an important component of native fish restoration, as these efforts are primarily funded by anglers. Without successful sport fishing programs and opportunities, native fish recovery efforts could be compromised.

***Comment 6:*** *Current largemouth bass fishery on Placid Lake is adequate and, healthy--no need for supplementation (Commenters 15, 16, 17, 18).*

FWP Response: FWP acknowledges that the current bass fishery is popular and self-sustaining. The proposal is simply a low-cost, relatively simple effort to increase consistency and quality of that fishery. It is common for largemouth bass reproduction to be inconsistent in northern latitudes because of the limited growing season during the first year of life. The proposed fish plants are viewed as low-density supplemental stocking to ensure consistent year-classes of bass in the lake.

***Comment 7:*** *The proposal would contribute to increased recreational use and social conflict on Placid Lake (Commenters 1, 5, 10, 17, 19).*

FWP Response: FWP acknowledges that a higher quality and more consistent bass fishery would likely increase angling use on Placid Lake. As the largest public water body within one hour of a major urban population (Missoula), high recreational use (including angling) should be anticipated. In addition, anglers and other sportspersons are the primary funding source for management of this public lake and its fisheries.

However, FWP strives to provide quality angling opportunities that are in balance with the activities of other constituents, including neighboring landowners. Unacceptable behavior by anglers is not condoned by FWP, and we agree that promoting respectful actions and attitudes should be an emphasis for anglers and the recreating public regardless of the fate of this proposal.

***Comment 8:*** *Use funding to control break-away reed islands and non-native lilies.*

FWP Response: Break-away “reed islands” and sections of bog vegetation are a natural process on Placid Lake. FWP does not support manipulation of this process (or removal of other native aquatic vegetation in the lake). FWP supports suppression of invasive, nonnative plant species, but funding for bass stocking cannot be used for invasive species suppression.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

FWP has reviewed the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and has determined that this action will likely not have significant effect on the human environment, but that more information on the status of bull trout is needed in the Placid Lake watershed before supplemental bass stocking is considered for implementation. I have concluded that the EA is


the appropriate level of analysis, and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

## **DECISION**

Based on the analysis in the Draft EA and public comment opposing or suggesting changes to the Proposed Action, I have selected the “No Action” alternative. FWP and partner agencies will collect additional information on the status of bull trout in the Placid Creek watershed prior to any future proposals for largemouth bass stocking. These additional data will include surveys to identify viable spawning populations in the upper watershed and evidence of consistent bull trout reproduction in the tributary stream system that supports the Placid Lake.

## **CONCLUSION**

By notification of and inclusion of this Decision Notice (and the changes noted herein), the draft EA is hereby made the final EA. The finding of selection for the “No Action” alternative is the product of this Decision Notice.

  
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7/8/15  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX A. Comments received by FWP on the Draft EA for the proposed "Resumed Largemouth Bass Stocking in Placid Lake" proposal. (Comments received via: E = email, Ph = phone.)

Com- men- ter #	Via	Para- graph	Comment
1	E	1	Count me as opposed to this idea. I am not in favor of spoiling a natural lake to produce a manufactured recreation opportunity. It sounds like you're ready to give up on the Bull trout population here, instead of nurturing it. Thanks to the continually expanding campground, there is already too much boat traffic on the lake. The latest fad is to equip them with big stereos, so I can hear that bass fisherman almost the entire time he circles the lake, and I'm inside with doors and windows shut. You know how you'll hear car stereos two blocks away, or feel them in your chest? The lake surface extends that to two miles. Maybe you could do something about regulating that increasing noise pollution. Or you could do something about the lily pad invasion.
		2	I can think of many ways FWP could put this time and money to better uses. I have the feeling someone called you up and was thinking, if not saying straight out, "I saw a fishing show on TV, and I went out and bought all the gear (they even have Nascar-like logo'd jackets to wear), but I don't catch bass every time I go out. You should stock them so I can use my bass boat." I'd buy the guy a canoe if I could afford it. The guy shouldn't have bought into that consumer fad, and FWP shouldn't want to help him make it a more palatable waste of money by enabling the decline of native trout and just plain quality of life here on Placid Lake.
		3	If you want a project, how about exploring a policy of motor-free days. I think lots of folks (not to mention Bull trout) would love to have Tuesdays and Wednesdays to enjoy conversations by the lake, with nothing louder than sailboats, kayaks and swimming children to interrupt them. I think the cabin owners would back a policy like that. What are the chances of getting FWP to cooperate on that idea? Multiple use policies have been hard on the users of silence - we could use someone in our corner. Jetskis, and increasingly other sources of noise, have ruined the enjoyment I used to get from a summer day at the lake. This proposal only promises to make it worse. Thanks for your time.
2	E	1	As a cabin owner for over 50 years on Placid Lake I support the proposed action to stock the lake with Largemouth Bass. It will benefit in a way not mentioned in the proposal; It will help by providing a stable population of this predator to the trash fish population that also varies in population as the bass population changes over time.
		2	The advent of additional sport fishing pressure has put the existing population under some stress. This proposal will enhance the sport fishing for the lake. I support the plan as outlined.
3	E		Best idea you guys have had in awhile! I think FWP needs to do more to promote sport fishing for bass state wide! The state is missing a huge opportunity to generate some money by attracting anglers and tournaments.
4	E	1	This is more of a question to you than a comment on the "Resumed Largemouth Bass Stocking in Placid Lake" proposal. So do not feel like you need to make this record. But for what it's worth I'm in favor of the stocking plan.
		2	Question 1 - how large will the stocked bass be? I ask because of the statement of survival rate of the current Placid Lake juveniles. This was mentioned as one of the motives of the stocking plan, so I just wanted to make sure we're not talking about merely feeding more Northern Pike Minnows when the stocking takes place. (Though I know that this is a nature of the beast by-product of all stocking plans)
		3	Question 2 - Since the survival rate was mentioned, has there been any discussion towards juvenile and fry habitat? (Such as fabricated plastic chicken-wire like cages) I would think that these could be put in places that folks would not see them (as in create eye-sores). Or even encourage home owners to put something like this under their docks each year. (Out of sight - out of mind)
		4	And finally Question 3 - Has there been any discussion in the possibility of using Placid as a resource for transplanting the Lee Metcalf catches. (I'm speaking of the mid-summer Kid's Day that Big Sky Bassers put on.) In recent years I believe FWP has transplanted the fish to Frenchtown Pond. Last year I was standing next to, I believe Ladd, by the tank-truck and thought I heard him mention Placid, but then heard later that they went to Frenchtown. I've never witnessed this, but have heard stories that folks really hammer through the newly released fish there in the days and nights after the transplant (keeping them). So I would love to see the Metcalf fish go into a larger body of water, so they do not become the "fish shot in a barrel".

5		I realize that when lakes are stocked, as you're proposing, there might be a certain amount of public outcry for stocking the lake with fish that cannot be harvested. I would like to see Placid remain a catch and release lake for bass. Perhaps the Metcalf transplant would be a way for FWP to "cheaply" increase the bass population there (I say "cheaply" cause we're probably talking about gas money and salaries for a couple biologists for a day) with this option. Perhaps combining this transplant with some habitat creation would set things in the right direction? The lake has been catch and release for quite some time now, and I suppose since the population hasn't sky-rocketed, you all are spot on with your juvenile fatality assessment. I'd encourage some focus on that.
6		And for what it's worth, I'd be more than happy and willing to help make, promote, and implement any sort of "habitat" like structures in the lake.
5	E	I oppose stocking Placid with bass. I would much prefer a plan to return Placid to a native species fishery. Seeley and Salmon have been ruined by a non-native species (pike). It would be wonderful for anglers in-state and guests from out-of-state to be able to enjoy a fishery that hasn't been decimated by "bucket biology." What is wrong with leaving some waters alone to let native species thrive? Furthermore, Placid is a relatively small body of water. It is already threatened with overuse from anglers and boaters. It doesn't need another reason for more people to drop their boats in.
6	E	[My wife and I], cabin owners at Placid lake are in favor of this resumption of stocking large mouth bass in Placid Lake.
7	E	I think this is a great idea, and I support it completely and without reservation. Two additional thoughts. First, I think some habitat improvement would definitely help maintain the bass population. Second, I would like to believe that somehow this action will eventually lead to some modest "catch and keep" arrangement; maybe a one fish daily limit with some sort of slot regulation. Thanks.
8	E	1 Please do NOT introduce more large mouth bass into Placid Lake. Your EA says the population sustains itself. Introduction of Large mouth bass in study after study finds /.."The species is very popular with anglers because of its aggressive feeding behaviour and vigorous fighting when hooked. As a result it has been introduced for sport fishing into many new habitats where it often displaces other predatory fish and eliminates other fish species. It has been declared one of the top 100 most damaging invasive species by the Global Invasive Species Database." ( <a href="http://www.torontozoo.com/explorethezoo/AnimalDetails.asp?pg=658">http://www.torontozoo.com/explorethezoo/AnimalDetails.asp?pg=658</a> ) In particular it is damaging to grebes, of which there is a wonderful population on Placid Lake.
		2 The EPA found large mouth bass "responsible for elimination of several native species of fish, reduction in total biomass of fish, predation on young flightless giant grebes, and competition for the insects and crustaceans eaten by the grebes" (EPA.org)
		3 This is a terrible idea.
9	E	The proposal to stock bass in Placid Lake is simply not a good idea. Please reconsider your decision. The bass will compete with the existing fish population and will be detrimental to the bird population as well...all this so that a few bass fisherman can have more sport!!! Please consider your stewardship responsibilities and do not implement this bad idea.
10	E	I am writing to strongly oppose the plan to increase largemouth bass numbers in Placid Lake. My family has owned a cabin on the northwest shore of the lake since 1980. Over this time we have watched as the lake has been degraded by irresponsible logging and development around the lake and increased speed boat use on the lake causing shoreline erosion. The reptiles, amphibians and crustaceans in the lake have declined and bass prey heavily on these species as well as any bull trout fry that may be left. In years that the bass populations have boomed we have had increased highspeed boat use as well as trolling motor use within feet of our dock, the motors are silent, but the stereos are loud. With the development of the day use area and the state park, the Lake is already so overcrowded that they routinely turn people away, why would any one see a need to provide any more recreational activities to this. Furthermore, the money should be spent on habitat restoration for bull trout and westslope cutthroat, other native species and not on an introduced warm water species that is doing just fine without help and will do even better as climate change continues. Thank you.
11	E	1 Please do not resume stocking Placid Lake Montana with bass.
		2 The basstuds make the water murky.
12	E	Bad idea ... get rid of the Pike and all other non native fish. You didn't learn at Flathead Lake with the lake trout fiasco,
13	E	I have a cabin at Placid Lake and have visited the lake most summers since the 1960s. I would be perfectly happy if Fish, Wildlife, and Parks stopped the program for stocking largemouth bass. It is a non-native species that causes adverse effects on native fish and bird species. I consider the fate of the native species to be more compelling than allowing people to catch a nonnative fish from the lake.

14	E		We do NOT support the reintroduction of large mouth bass into Placid Lake.... there are still bass in the lake, but there are also Bull Trout, whose habitat is threatened by large mouth bass, (along with other factors). Please do not compromise native fish habitat just to please sport fishermen! Keep it wild!
15	E		I own a home on Placid Lake and my experience is that the bass population is currently adequate. I would recommend not artificially increasing the bass population. I have been a member of a family with a home or a homeowner at the lake since 1970 and witness and catch more bass every year. Bass populations do not seem to be a concern to the fishermen I interact with and if there is data that suggests any adding to the population will have a negative impact on other aquatic species the population should be allowed to moderate naturally.
16	E		Having spent countless hours/days on Placid Lake over the past 20+ years and having both fished and observed many other fishermen - I think that there are plenty of bass in the lake at the current time. The lake appears to be very "healthy" and I would therefore be very hesitant to mess with its balance at this time. I have seen large bull trout caught from the lake - so I know that they are there. Placid has managed to avoid northern pike so far, unlike the other Clearwater lakes. The bull trout remain threatened. If stocking more large omnivorous predators adds even a small additional loss of bull trout numbers to the equation, I question its validity.
17	E	1	Dear Pat & Ladd, Thank you for your time this week. While you helped me understand FWP's reasoning, I still can't support the plan. I feel STRONGLY this plan to stock even a small number of bass might compromise the delicate population of bull trout we are excited to call residents! If you have no idea how many bass are in Placid, how can you keep the population under 5 per cent? The plan for ANNUAL stocking, even only \$5000 worth, is NOT NECESSARY! We have a population of bass in Placid! They are not native, not endangered, and large mouth bass have even made the Global Invasive Species Database list of the top 100 most damaging invasive species.
		2	I understand your mission is to provide prey for sport fishers, but let me assure you good bass fishers catch bass on Placid Lake.
		3	Meanwhile, if you are looking for a project, let's figure a non-lethal way for the low-landers to eliminate the non-native lily pads which prevent boats from getting to docks. The aquatic Round-up solution is NOT okay!
		4	Thank you for all you do for "the resource". And thank you for considering my comments!
18	E	1	I have a cabin on the south side of Placid Lake & I've just heard about the plan to begin stocking the lake with Largemouth Bass. I think this is not a good idea since these large predators can endanger native fish populations and young grebes, which nest near my cabin. There's still good fishing in the lake without this invasive species.
		2	I hope you'll take these views into account.
19	E	1	We hope FWP reconsiders stocking Bass in Placid. I believe there are enough Bass in the outlet and they're encroaching into the lake already. Money may be better spent controlling the breaking away of the reed islands and cleaning up the outlet from the non-native lilies. We think Kelly Burgess sums up our feelings very succinctly:
		2	"What I've learned recently makes it (stocking Bass in Placid Lake) seem to me like a bad idea.
		3	1) They just netted two bull trout here in the lake the other day, so it's too soon to give up on our bull trout population.
		4	2) "Large mouth bass has been introduced for sport fishing into many new habitats where it often displaces other predatory fish and eliminates other fish species. It has been declared one of the top 100 most damaging invasive species by the Global Invasive Species Database." ( <a href="http://www.torontozoo.com/explorethetoo/AnimalDetails.asp?pg=658">http://www.torontozoo.com/explorethetoo/AnimalDetails.asp?pg=658</a> )
		5	3) The EPA found large mouth bass "responsible for elimination of several native species of fish, reduction in total biomass of fish, predation on young flightless giant grebes, and competition for the insects and crustaceans eaten by the grebes"
		6	I just think it's not the FWP's job to create an artificial recreational thing here at the expense of our traditional populations. If you agree, a quick email to [FWP contact] might help prevent this - I'm sure we can all think of better ways the money could be spent to improve things at Placid."
20	Ph	1	He wanted more information on the proposal
		2	After information provided to him by FWP, he is OK with the proposal.